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QUESTION OF PALESTINE

SECURITY COUNCIL  
Thirty-eighth year

Letter dated 30 March 1983 from the Chairman of the Committee on the  
Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to the  
Secretary-General

In my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, it is my solemn obligation to draw to your immediate attention a distressing event in the occupied territories of the West Bank that has served to exacerbate tension in the region still further and, by extension, threaten world peace.

The event that I refer to concerns the widely reported illness among Arab schoolgirls in the occupied West Bank. Local residents believe the illness to have been induced by some kind of poison, perhaps even gas poisoning, in the girls' classrooms.

In this matter I refer you to an item in the New York Times of 28 March 1983 where it is reported that at least 250 Arab schoolgirls in five schools in Jenin and Araba suffered recently from dizziness, headaches, fainting spells and stomach pains. The mayor of Jenin has put the number affected at 400; the spokesman for the Israeli Civil Administration put it at about 250; the Israeli radio quoting Israeli officials reported the number as 317. Palestine Liberation Organization sources have quoted a figure of some 1,000 young people.

As you are aware, this deplorable event comes amid ever-rising tension in the West Bank, a territory of some 800,000 Arabs that was occupied by Israel in the 1967 war.

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\* A/38/50.

A/38/128  
S/15667  
English  
Page 2

While it is reported in the New York Times of 29 March 1983 that the Israeli Health Ministry has found no traces of poison in the schools concerned in the occupied West Bank, the Washington Post in its issue of 30 March 1983 reports that a medical doctor at the Jenin hospital has said that he has treated some 70 patients, all showing symptoms of gas poisoning.

I am informed that investigators from the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations have been called upon regarding the recent event. Pending results of any investigation that might be carried out, may I take this opportunity to urge, on behalf of the Committee, that you be so good as to exercise your office as Secretary-General to ascertain the full extent, cause and perpetrators of the abhorrent event. I might add that it is to the deep sadness of the Committee that it is particularly the young people in the occupied territories that have taken the brunt of those acts of repression and violation of human rights that have taken place over recent years in the West Bank.

In view of the immense gravity of the events I have discussed in this letter I should be most grateful to have it circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 33 of the preliminary list, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Massamba SARRE  
Chairman of the  
Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable  
Rights of the Palestinian People